

I returned to Washington, D.C., this week to a very different House of Representatives.

Clearly, the voice of the American people was heard on November 2, 2010, and the dynamics of Congress are changing in a number of ways. The most apparent difference is seen in the at least 94 newly elected Members of the House of Representatives who this week arrived in Washington and will be sworn in on January 5, 2011. Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of all House Members are in the process of departing office, and leadership of every standing committee from Agriculture to Judiciary and Veterans Affairs to Natural Resources is changing hands. Significant changes to the way Congress operates are also being prepared to increase fairness and transparency. All in all, the next month and a half will be a time of intense transition to prepare to govern in the 112th Congress.

While so much about Congress is changing, the pressing challenges before us as a nation and the American people remain the same: government spending, taxes, the war in Afghanistan, health care reform, and a new Farm Bill are all critical policy areas that will demand open and honest collaboration in the new Congress.

In my view, unsustainable government spending and deepening deficits are of primary concern. The federal government is on track to run a \$1.3 trillion deficit this year and holds a debt of more than \$13 trillion. It is simply unable to meet its obligations without significant borrowing – now about 40 cents of every dollar it spends. Such financial vulnerability creates great uncertainty and threatens both economic and national security. We must put the fiscal house in order. Structural budgetary reforms, including a balanced budget requirement, the presidential line-item veto, and a biennium budgeting plan warrant serious review and bipartisan deliberation.

Fair and equitable tax policies are another important economic concern. Earlier this decade, various individual and household tax rate reductions were enacted. These reductions are estimated to save the average Nebraska family \$1,600 per year. Unless Congress takes action, the reductions will expire at the end of this year and the tax rates will increase to previous levels, impacting an already fragile economy. It is my belief that Washington doesn't have as much of a revenue problem as it has a spending problem — fiscal responsibility is the best course of action.

In Afghanistan, American troops continue their work in dangerous and uncertain conditions. Security and order are critical to that nation's long-term stability and capability to suppress the activities of global terrorists. The Administration appears to be rethinking a planned drawdown of U.S. forces in 2011. Congress must be engaged in this important decision to ensure the safety of our soldiers and their timely return while achieving stability in this volatile part of the world.

Health care reform will continue to be debated. While I support prudent reforms to our health care system, I am deeply concerned that the new health care law does not address the underlying drivers of escalating costs, shifts costs to more unsustainable spending, and erodes health care liberties. I also believe that all public policies, from health care to foreign aid, should be life-affirming. For these and many other reasons, I will support efforts to repeal and redraft this law.

Finally, a new Farm Bill, which has very important implications for Nebraska and the Heartland, is scheduled to be crafted in the next Congress. I had the privilege of working directly to craft the 2008 Farm Bill. Good farm policy should continue to reflect the diversity of agricultural practices in our country, helping manage the risk of farmers who help feed the world while also strengthening new agricultural opportunities involving direct-to-consumer marketing, regional food systems, and the development of ag-based renewable energy.

While the House of Representatives will look much different in 2011 than it did in 2010, our work must remain focused on restoring America's economic and national security. The challenges before us will require bold leadership and thoughtful cooperation that centers on the long-term well-being of American families and communities.